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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 004971

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: WHO'S YOUR DAHABI?

REF: A. AMMAN 4737
[1](#)B. ADNAN ABU ODEH "JORDANIANS PALESTINIANS AND THE
HASHEMITE KINGDOM (1999)
[1](#)C. AMMAN 4692

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. There are now two Dahabis at the center of Jordanian political life. Nader Dahabi is the Prime Minister, and his brother Mohammed is entering his third year as director of the General Intelligence Directorate (GID). While there is little public conversation on the subject, it is quietly raising eyebrows amongst Jordan's political classes. Among those inclined towards cynicism or conspiracy theories, the appointments are a dangerous indication of who is in bed with whom. Others see it as a positive indication that the government and the GID will finally be on the same page, even if the optics are not ideal. Some point out that the limited reach of the Dahabi family is a natural ceiling on the brothers' ambitions. For his part, the King sees the two as competent technocrats who are fit to get the job done.
End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The appointment of Nader Dahabi as Prime Minister to serve alongside his younger brother Mohammed Dahabi, who is head of the General Intelligence Directorate (GID), has raised eyebrows across Jordan. While many in the elite political classes grudgingly acknowledge that both men are well qualified, there is a certain amount of grumbling and theorizing about the signals that are being sent. There are all kinds of actors who are assumed to be behind the double Dahabi phenomenon - the King, the government, and even the United States.

Conspiracy Theories Galore

[1](#)3. (C) The dual Dahabi appointments are an easy target for conspiracy theorists. Several of the swirling rumors involve the U.S. as the prime mover behind the appointment of the two Dahabis. "They are decent people, but both of them were imposed by the U.S.," said one contact. Zaki Beni-Irshaid, head of the opposition Islamic Action Front (IAF), called the appointments "a preamble to a new age of political feudalism of ruling families."

[1](#)4. (C) Falak Jemani, Madaba parliamentarian and recent candidate for speaker (Ref A), described the appointment of two Dahabis as "not good". She assumed that there would be conflicts of interest, and stressed that the appointments send the wrong signal when it comes to combating "wasta" (influence-peddling) and corruption in general. Eva Abu Halawah, Director of MIZAN, a well-known Jordanian NGO that provides legal assistance to needy Jordanians, says that it seemed "dangerous" to have brothers running the government and the GID. Former Irbid parliamentarian Yunus Al-Jamra agrees, calling the appointments "bad for democracy".

15. (C) On the flip side of the coin, Bishr Khasawneh, the head of the Europe and Americas Bureau (and formerly Legal Advisor) at the MFA, described the appointment of the two Dahabis as "a major statement by the King", and a positive development. He acknowledged that people are talking about it, but called the conspiracy theories "false prohibitions." "The appointment of these two people means that this cabinet is about the ability to deliver," he says. Journalist Sa'ad Salawi called the move a "net plus," said that Mohammed Dahabi will serve as a valued advisor to the Prime Minister (a political neophyte) especially on the vagaries of pushing legislation through parliament. NGO activist Malik Athamneh asserted that the Dahabi brothers' similar personalities mitigate the suspicion that their relation causes. He posits that their past roles as hard-nosed executives - Nader in the private sector sense, Mohammed in the bureaucratic sense - prove that they are professionals who will not let blood ties get in the way of accomplishing their goals.

16. (C) Political activist Jemal Refai agreed, but nonetheless called the appointments "absurd." He recognized that both Dahabis are well qualified to serve in their respective jobs, but points out that there are many others who are equally qualified yet do not have the baggage of being directly related. "Both men are qualified, but aren't there any others out there?" he asks. "Our mentality can't accept this." Journalist Rana Sabbagh sees the double Dahabi phenomenon as a good move in terms of harmonizing government operations, but wonders what will happens if the duo fails to produce. She worries that in the aftermath of a Dahabi government, government-GID relations could take a dive,

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resulting in a net negative for the country.

The Tribal Issue

17. (C) Several observers remark that the smaller family base of the Dahabi brothers is a natural ceiling on their ambitions. Unlike many other politicians in Jordan, the Dahabis are not the representatives of a powerful tribe. Their family is said to have migrated to the Salt/Balqa area of central Jordan from Syria, and is not (yet) counted among the prominent familial groupings in Jordan. This is comforting for some Jordanians, who would see two brothers from a powerful tribe in such powerful positions as favoring one tribe over the others - a tribal coup of sorts (which has always been avoided in Jordanian politics because the Hashemites - a non-Jordanian family - function as a "supratribal" power structure - Ref B). In the absence of such a connection, the two Dahabis are seen as necessarily limited in the damage they could do to Jordan's tribal balance.

The King's Decision

18. (C) As outlined in Ref C, the King anticipated some criticism for having brothers in two of Jordan's most powerful positions, but decided that a harmonious inter-agency process was worth the risk. The decision was not made rashly - the King gave the repercussions serious thought. On balance, the King felt that the relationship of the two Dahabis would work to the nation's advantage, ensuring smooth government-GID relations, a rarity in Jordan's recent history and especially in the previous government. The King also reasoned that the Dahabis complemented each other's style. He sees Nader Dahabi as a "can-do" player whose weakness is in connecting to everyday people. Mohammed Dahabi's role was envisioned as shoring up political support for the new government, and guiding the new PM through Jordanian politics at the national level. The

spirit of harmony also extends to another key player, Royal Court Chief Bassem Awadallah, who was tireless in his criticism of the former government. Wary about his relationship with the GID Director, Awadallah is likely to be more careful in his interactions with the new government, which in any event is filled with many of his allies and about which he seems sincerely pleased.

Comment

19. (C) Jordan's new cabinet was designed with harmony in mind. In this sense, the placement of the Dahabi brothers is merely in line with the government's ethos. The extra hurdle that Nader and Mohammed Dahabi will now have to face is the dual nature of the theories surrounding them. On the one hand, they will have to overcome their familial relationship and escape the perceived whirlpool of corruption that turns political figures into dishonest people in the eyes of average Jordanians even when they may be innocent. Yet they will also face the expectation that their relationship will produce the kind of change that Jordan needs - something that may well take more than two brothers to create.
Hale